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Written on AUGUST 28, 2014 AT 1:57 PM by SVANDERWERFF

Food and Water Risk Assessments

Filed under FLEET AND THE FLEET MARINE FORCE, FORCE HEALTH AND SAFETY, HEATH (NO COMMENTS)

By Anthony Carotenuto



According to DoD regulations, the Secretaries of the Military must provide public health protection for deployed forces during initial entry, exercises, and other short-term operations conducted outside the continental United States.

Ever wonder how we provide public health protection for our Department of Defense (DoD) personnel when conducting an exercise or meeting outside the United States at a location where we have no permanent installations?

According to DoD regulations, the Secretaries of the Military must provide public health protection for deployed forces during initial entry, exercises, and other short-term operations conducted outside the continental United States. As public health professionals, we conduct these assessments to anticipate, identify, and assess health threats.


The assessors develop recommended countermeasures, make risk decisions, and recommend controls to mitigate health threats. Food, bottled water, and ice providers are evaluated using a risk based assessment for actual or potential health threats, intentional and unintentional microbiological, chemical, or physical contamination of the and the food supply, evaluating potential exposure pathways, and determining countermeasures and mitigation strategies to control or reduce the health threats to DoD personnel. Food and Water Risk Assessments (FWRA) are applied to short-term term use, and are valid through the end of the exercise, meeting, etc. For recurring use facilities, FWRAs are valid for not more than 6 months. The Operational Commander or person in-charge makes the final decision on what is an acceptable risk.


In the spirit of jointness, the


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Navy & Marine Corps Public Health Center collaborated with the Army Veterinary Service welcoming Navy Environmental Health Officers to attend the Army Veterinary Service FWRA training course. The first-ever joint FWRA course was held at JBSA-Fort Sam Houston, Texas. Instructors Lt. Col. Stephanie Mont and Mr. Ronald Jech shared not only the “How Tos” but also their personal experiences in conducting FWRAs around the globe.



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Representing the Navy were four Environmental Health Officers (EHOs) and myself. The EHOs were strategically chosen from Norfolk, San Diego, and Pearl Harbor, Hi. These locations were specifically selected to provide global coverage in response to requests for services from NORTHCOM, PACOM, EUCOM, AFRICOM, CENTCOM and SOUTHCOM. In the future, we will include additional EHOs in the training to allow flexibility in our choices in response to request for services from the Fleet and Marine Corps. Feedback from the Navy attendees was positive. “The course provided a great overview of the FWRA program highlighting many complexities involved for obtaining food and water from OCONUS local sources in austere environments,” said Lt. William Eickmeyer, EHO from Navy Environmental and Preventive Medicine Unit Six, Pearl Harbor.

This service is key to mission success for the senior operational commander or designated COCOM representative. It will provide a risk assessment that will allow the commander to make decisions to use a facility, not use a facility or to modify the types of food and water that our personnel would be recommended to consume. When issues are found during the FWRAs our assessor will make recommendations to the facilities for procedural or physical changes (i.e. adding a handwashing sink or disinfectant raw fruit and vegetables) to reduce risk to our personnel.

Nothing is more frustrating and degrades the mission more than to have numerous personnel develop a foodborne illness reducing the efficiency of any mission. FWRAs cannot guarantee that all food and water is safe at all times. It does offer our personnel and commanders a reasonable scientific approach that the food and water consumed has been assessed, and mitigation strategies have been recommended. These efforts make the consumption of food and water from these locations as safe as possible.

For additional information contact us at the Navy & Marine Corps Public Health Center at 757.953.0712 DSN 377-0712.

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